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PROGRAM Panorama

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SUBJECT Central Intelligence Agency

RON NESSEN: We're going to begin the program today by talking about the Central Intelligence agency. It seems to have been in the news a great deal these past two or three years, and again in the news this week because President Carter signed an executive order which reorganizes the CIA. We're going to talk about that and some other of the somewhat controversial events at the CIA with Henry Knoche, who is a former Deputy Director of the CIA, and, in fact, at one time was the Acting Director, between George Bush and Stansfield Turner; and with Jack Maurey, who was with the CIA for 27 years, former head of the Soviet Desk, and from there went over to the Defense Department as Assistant Secretary of Defense; and with Georgie Anne Geyer, who is a syndicated columnist and, I suppose as much as any reporter, is an expert and concentrates on the activities of the intelligence organizations.

First of all, let me try to sum up just briefly, if I can, the reorganization that was signed this week by the President. It gives the CIA Director, who right now is Stansfield Turner, control over the budgets of the other intelligence organizations, those in the Defense Department, the NSA, and others. It also gives the Director of Central Intelligence power to give the other intelligence organizations their assignments, what they should do. Stansfield Turner did not get the total power, the sort of czardom that he wanted, with Cabinet rank.

On the other side, this new executive order forbids the CIA to undertake covert activities in the United States, it prevents -- forbids, really, assassination attempts by the CIA or its agents. It prohibits the CIA from dealing with the academic world, other non-governmental organizations, without letting them know that they're dealing with the CIA. And it restricts surveil-

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lance of former government employees living within the United States.

Well, that's a very brief summary, really, of what the reorganization does.

As a former Deputy Director, how will that affect the ability of the United States to gather and interpret intelligence?

HENRY KNOCHE: Well, Ron, first of all, let me say that I regard the new executive order as a very constructive additional step, all aimed at trying to balance the needs for important intelligence information concerning the foreign scene without at the same time trampling the rights and privacy of American citizens. And sometimes that's a very tough order.

But this began, in my view, back with the issuance of President Ford's executive order in February 1976. You'll recall that the reviews and investigations of intelligence were largely finished at the end of 1975, and an effort was made to balance these things that I've just talked about, to make the intelligence world more accountable to checks and balances within our government system.

The Ford executive order of '76 accomplished much. And this one by President Carter is an evolutionary thing which adds even more to this process of keeping intelligence accountable.

NESSEN: Jack, are you concerned that even though Stansfield Turner did not get all the power he wanted, that this puts too much power over the entire intelligence community in the hands of one man?

JACK MAUREY: I think it's too soon to say, Ron, but I think that is a possibility. I think where that is particularly relevant is in the area of the control of resources, because I know that the feeling of some of the heads of the service intelligence agencies in the Pentagon is that if they have the responsibility, they ought to control the resources with which they carry out that responsibility.

NESSEN: In other words, determine how much -- they ought to decide how much they can afford to spend to this accomplish whatever assignment they're...

MAUREY: Well, I recognize that it's desirable for the Director of Central Intelligence to allocate money as between -- recommend the allocation of money between the three services. But once, let's say, the Air Force is given X number of million or billion dollars to do a job, I think, beyond that, it ought to be up to the Air Force to have that money allocated as between different Air Force programs.

Now, I'm not sure how that will work out in practice. Maybe, Hank, you have a perception of how that will actually work out.

KNOCHE: Well, you know, basically, the Director of Central Intelligence has two responsibilities. One is he has to be the head of the CIA, one agency in the intelligence community, and the other is to coordinate the entire intelligence effort of the government.

NESSEN: But that was always a paper responsibility, until now.

KNOCHE: It was a paper responsibility because he didn't really have a grip, wasn't permitted to have a grip, on the resources which were applied to the intelligence community.

Now, the Ford executive order made a start along those lines in '76. And George Bush, then the Director, working with a committee, a small committee which he chaired, began to hack away at this problem.

This executive order gives the Director of Central Intelligence the responsibility for approving the national intelligence budgets. So he's by himself now, not with a committee, but he's got to report his budgetary views and findings, through the National Security Council, to the President, and through, I might say, the Office of Management and Budget. So it will be scrubbed by the budgetary process.

GEORGIE ANNE GEYER: Well, I think all this is very important, gentlemen, but I think those of us in the press who've been watching this all have come up with sort of one question. We're back again to the mechanistic view, and it's very important. I'm not saying that this is not important, the budget, etcetera. But what we don't see in the reorganization of the CIA is what we don't see in the rest of the Administration: a basic new philosophy, a basic new conceptualization. It's out with the old -- and most of us are not unhappy with a lot of that, frankly -- but it's in with what? I mean what is Admiral Turner's conception of the new CIA?

If you can tell me, I'd be very interested, because nobody can say.

KNOCHE: Well, I think, Georgie Anne, you've put your finger on one of the problems that plagues the agency and its people right now -- that is, that a reorganization, a realignment within CIA, quite apart from this executive order, has taken place over the last few months.

It's not well understood by the rank-and-file in the agency, as best I can tell. It's rather murky. It's not well articulated,

not well spelled out. And one of the concerns of the people at CIA that has had its impact on the morale of the people is their fear that they're in the process of fragmentation. And, of course, they're in an outfit which has been deemed to be terribly important to the national interest; it's been examined, reviewed, interrogated; it has new controls on it to which the people are adjusting.

But having been found to be important to the national interest, it's very difficult to those great men and women in that agency now suddenly to feel that they're somehow or other in the process of fragmentation.

NESSEN: Let me put a little finer point on Georgie Anne's question. Because you bring up the reorganization of the past couple of months. I suppose the people who have gone through the reorganization and have been retired would have a slightly different word for it.

Would that indicate that Admiral Turner's conception of the CIA, as Georgie Anne puts it, is that it is going to rely a great deal more on mechanical, scientific, electronic means of intelligence, and less on the human spy, for lack of a better word?

KNOCHE: I don't think so, Ron. I think that the tendency for the last 10 or 15 years has been to rely more and more on science and technology to help us collect vitally needed information abroad. It's been a remarkable thing. It's been one of the real true milestones of American intelligence the way that process has taken place.

But you still have limitations on what science and technology can do for you in collecting information we need. What's really needed, down deep, is information relating to the intentions of foreign governments, particularly those who are potential enemies. And in order to obtain that kind of information, about what's in the minds of men and leadership around the world, you need human sources who are in good position to get access to that kind of information.

No camera, no airplane, no satellite that I know of can acquire that kind of information.

GEYER: Aren't we being badly -- now let me take the other side, a position that is not popular with the press, but which I think we should deal with too, is: Aren't we being hurt? We keep reading about the number of KGB spies coming into this country, and so on, and they're on Capitol Hill wooing this staff, etcetera. Aren't we being hurt in this way, too?

MAUREY: Let me speak to that and tie it in with something on your earlier point, Georgie Anne.

First of all, when you talk about a new look, I think what a lot of people are concerned about is not the reality of CIA but the image, the mythology, a mythology that's been created by the press. A CIA that assassinated people. Well, CIA never assassinated anybody. There were assassination proposals in the White House. They were never carried out. But they were never carried out.

CIA involvement in the drug traffic. Absolutely no truth in any of that, but the press was full of it here 10 years ago. It's been firmly repudiated by John Ingersoll, the head of the BNDD, for instance.

CIA an unguided missile, a rogue elephant, that people used to talk about. Both the Church and Pike Committees completely repudiated that. The conclusion of the Pike Committee Report was that in all important respects CIA had carried out the orders of the President or the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.

CIA corruption of the press. I was on a congressional hearing on that a few weeks ago, and a number of distinguished members of your profession followed me. But none of them, to this day, has identified a single case where any significant news disseminated in the United States was corrupted by anything CIA had done, or where any newspaper reporter had in any way violated his obligation to his employer or his public as a result of involvement with CIA.

So there's all this mythology that we've got to get rid of, I think, before we can sensibly address the questions that we're talking about now.

NESSEN: But there's a new myth growing up, it seems to me, and that is that you've got hundreds of CIA agents, and the covert agents, really, who are being fired in a way that they feel is peremptory and cold and callous. Now there's a myth that's beginning to permeate Washington that these hundreds of ex-CIA agents are just ripe for being recruited by the KGB and other foreign intelligence, that they're mad, they're angry, resentful at their own country, their own CIA, and that they may be perfect recruits to be picked up by a foreign power.

Do you see that as a danger?

KNOCHE: Well, only in the classical kind of sense. The people of CIA are terribly disciplined, they're very professional, extremely dedicated. And, of course, nobody likes to be fired. Some, no doubt, are bitter. Many are quite vocal and quite public in some of the complaints and criticisms they're making about Admiral Turner as the Director. That, I think, is unfortunate because it impacts upon the shaky state of morale at CIA.

But it's one thing to complain about being treated badly; it's another thing to be recruited by a foreign intelligence power and to sell secrets which would really hurt this government. And having known the people that inhabit that place, work in that place, I simply don't believe that there's great danger of this taking place.

MAUREY: It's remarkable that in 30 years, during which time there must have been 50 to 60 or 70 thousand people at one time or another involved with CIA, we really had only a half a dozen bad apples that have really gone out to destroy and discredit the agency.

Philip Agee, who's obviously involved in a major -- well, I don't think I have to bell anybody in this room who he's involved with. He defected to the Cubans, and everybody knows who runs the Cubans.

Then you've got guys that defected because -- or at least turned against the agency because they didn't get promoted. Agee and Snapp and Stockwell, and so on. These are people who were given front-page space in all the media in the country on the basis of no credentials whatever except that they were made with an agency that didn't promote them when they wanted to be promoted.

But in any event, I think, as far as you're concerned about the rank-and-file being susceptible to Soviet exploitation, it is indeed a real danger. And I recall that at the time of the purges of the KGB following Beria's purge many years ago, we got a real windfall of defectors and recruitments in the Russian service.

NESSEN: Were you head of the Soviet Desk of the CIA then?

MAUREY: I was.

NESSEN: And you targeted in on those KGB agents who had been purged?

MAUREY: Yes, we did.

NESSEN: Why would you then think that it wouldn't work the other way around?

MAUREY: Well, because I think there's better morale and more patriotism in this country than there is in Russia.

NESSEN: But Hank just said that morale is shaky at the CIA.

MAUREY: It is shaky but I don't think it goes to the point of treason.

KNOCHE: I agree with that, Jack.

GEYER: I do have to answer you on one thing, Mr. Maurey. I was in Vietnam four different occasions, and no one can tell me that we didn't assassinate people, because I was with CIA agents in the field who were carrying through the Phoenix program. I just don't want to let that go unanswered. I don't want to get into a long discussion about that. I think we should put that behind us at this point and look at where are we going now.

There's an odd thing going on in the press. Many of the press, and I admit this, who called for an end to covert activities are now taking the individual cases, in a kind of sentimental way, of the agents who carried these through.

Do you know what I mean, Ron?

NESSEN: I do.

GEYER: And saying, "Oh, these poor guys. They're really being" -- and it's a human thing, but we've got to -- so, what I'm looking for is some high-level conceptualizing, some new philosophy about where we're going. And I don't think we're getting it from Admiral Turner. We're getting -- we're getting cuts, we're getting reorganization, we're getting mechanical answers. And I don't think -- I think the American people are very confused. I know that CIA is confused.

MAUREY: Well, what are you suggesting? I mean Morton Halperin is the head of an organization to abolish spying, for instance. Is that the kind of thing that you're talking about?

GEYER: No, no, on the contrary. I'm calling for some new conceptualizing from the CIA. I'm not against spying at all.

KNOCHE: Let me give you a hand with this, because I, too, think that what's needed here now is a fresh look at where we'd go into the future.

The intelligence organizations have gone through the investigations and reviews. There's a new definition of controls to keep them above board and prevent them from being abusive. But it's recognized that they're important to the national need and security to have them.

Therefore, we've got to have fine people, good people continuing to be interested in working for an outfit like CIA. To count on that, they've got to have a sense of purpose, a sense of direction, a sense of where they're headed, and a sense of belonging to an organization that really counts.

This is the fundamental challenge in leadership to Admiral

Turner and to his new Deputy-designate, Frank Carlucci, who is, I think, this very day...

NESSEN: I think today is Frank's confirmation hearing.

GEYER: Are they doing this, though, do you feel?

KNOCHE: Not yet. And I think that's one of the things where Admiral Turner's got to concentrate some of his attention, in CIA terms, not community terms: paying some attention to that agency, nurturing it, bringing it along.

The other area Ronald didn't spell out too much in talking about the executive order, but, once again, it's full of restraints, shalt nots, the no-nos of the business. And well and good. That's fine. It makes the agency...

NESSEN: You say "once again," but only once again since the Ford executive order. Before the Ford executive order there were no...

KNOCHE: Well, but we've had that same sort of approach from the Senate Select Committee, the House Select Committee: constraints on intelligence. And over and over again, the oversight bodies are looking at outfits like CIA to see that they're in compliance with the constraints and restrictions.

But what I'm about to suggest for the future is that the authorities must not only look to see that intelligence agencies are in compliance with those restrictions, but whether or not intelligence is being unnecessarily impaired by those restrictions.

NESSEN: Well, let me ask you about those.

KNOCHE: And the restriction part of it is getting all the emphasis. The effectiveness is not being examined.

NESSEN: But one of the restrictions is the requirement to notify Congress of covert operations. It gives Congress no veto power, but it requires a notification.

Now, how many members are notified? At the end of the '75 investigation, at one point there was a proposal that would have had, I think, 170 members of Congress informed of covert operations, which obviously means that there can be no covert operations.

KNOCHE: The problem has been that the Director of Central Intelligence, once the President signs on the dotted line for a covert action abroad, the Director then must go and tell seven congressional committees about that. That simply is far too many.



NESSEN: Is that the present...

KNOCHE: The present arrangements, under the Hughes-Ryan Amendment, which is a matter of law.

Now, with the formation of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the newly designated House Select Committee on Intelligence, here, I think, is a chance to focus these matters in two committees rather than in this galaxy of seven that we've had before.

NESSEN: What's been the effect, though -- you say a galaxy of seven. Hasn't that, in effect, just about ruled out any real covert operations? You can't -- I mean let's face it, we all know members of Congress. And if even one member out of the seven committees disagreed with a covert operation, all he had to do was publicize it, and it blows it out of the water.

KNOCHE: Well, that was further complicated in the House because of Rule 11, which permits...

NESSEN: Any member can go and look at the...

KNOCHE: Any one member can look at the transcripts and data belonging to any given committee.

But I think these matters can be dealt with. I would be hard put to say that Congress has been the source of an awful lot of leaks. I think that's demonstrable in a few cases, and you make certain assumptions. But most of the committees that have had experience with intelligence have been pretty good about it. But it's got to be focused in fewer than seven committees, no question about it.

But covert action as a tool for American foreign policy has fallen into disfavor. It's been used less and less, quite apart from congressional controls, over the last 10 years or so.

NESSEN: Well, thank you very much, gentlemen, for this, I think, really interesting discussion of something that's important to America's role in the world and America's future.